

It Takes Three to Tango: Ramon Llull, Solomon ibn Adret and Alfonso of Valladolid Debate the Trinity

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Abstract

Ramon Llull used what he called “necessary reason” to prove the truth of Christianity in general and the doctrine of the Trinity in particular. He appropriated contemporary Kabbalistic ideas about the Godhead in order to demonstrate that their reasoning implied the existence of a Trinity and that Christianity was the true faith. Solomon ibn Adret was forced to use Kabbalistic teachings to contradict Llull’s arguments and show that sefrotic imagery did not imply a Trinitarian structure in the Godhead. Alfonso of Valladolid, a Jewish convert to Christianity, utilizes Llull’s arguments and translates them into a Jewish context and language in a way that supersedes and dismisses Solomon ibn Adret’s response. Unlike Llull who was not familiar with the intricacies of the Hebrew language, Alfonso was able to translate Llull’s arguments about the Trinity into a language that would be immediately recognizable and more difficult to refute for his Jewish contemporaries.

Keywords

Trinity, *Sefirot*, Kabbalah, Judaism, Christianity, conversion, Ramon Llull, Solomon ibn Adret, Alfonso of Valladolid

The “trialogue” described here did not take place on a particular day, but is one that reflects the interaction between Jewish and Christian thinkers living more or less at the same time, having to deal with similar existential issues and find solutions that enable them to make sense of their particular historical circumstances. What links these three figures is that the issue considered here is central, intricate and critical, and cannot be swept aside or ignored without consequences for broader circles of co-religionists. Ramon Llull, the instigator, was driven by his desire to convert Jews and Muslims, inspired by the belief that he was the recipient of a divinely

revealed Art, a science based not on authoritative texts, but on necessary reason, which could conclusively demonstrate the truth of Christianity. Solomon ibn Adret, a leader of his community and the disciple of one of the greatest religious figures of the thirteenth century, Nahmanides, felt obligated to react and respond to the challenge, in order to preserve the authenticity and relevance of his Jewish faith for his co-religionists. The third figure, Abner of Burgos, otherwise known as Alfonso de Valladolid, is perhaps the most interesting. He moved between Judaism and Christianity for many years, before opting, at least formally, for the latter faith. Yet, his engagement with the arguments of the former two figures, both Christian and Jew, shows an ambivalence that blurs the boundaries between the faiths and raises interesting issues about identity in a multi-confessional society.

Ramon Llull (c. 1232-1316), born and raised in Majorca, recently recaptured from the Muslims, wrote some two hundred works in Latin, Catalan and Arabic, many of which were attempts to refine the divinely revealed Art which he believed encompassed all knowledge and led to the necessary conclusion that Christianity was indeed the true faith. To prove the existence of the Trinity, one of the main stumbling blocks between Judaism and Christianity, Llull focused on the internal workings of the Godhead and the divine attributes in the same way that some of his Jewish contemporaries were developing the concept of the *Sefirot*, the divine attributes or Dignities (See Scholem; Idel, *Kabbalah* and “*Dignitate*”). These Kabbalists were attempting to offer an alternative understanding of the nature of the Divine Being, creation, the exile and the relationship between man and God to that proposed by Maimonides and his followers. They posited the existence of the ten *Sefirot* emanating from within the *Ein sof* (‘the Infinite’) as revealing different aspects of the Divine and His presence in creation and allowing man to ascend to God.

Llull, like many of his Jewish contemporaries, claimed that each of the Dignities is simultaneously present in all the others and that their activity is both within and outside themselves. In other words, the Dignities represent the creative element of the Godhead. Over some thirty years, Llull developed and refined his theory of the correlatives of action, which explained how creation could have taken place without any change in the Godhead, a concept that preoccupied the thoughts of his Jewish contemporaries as well. The basis of his theory is that if one wants to avoid change in the Godhead, one must admit the existence of a triad of agent-patient-action within each of the Dignities, which are the divine essence.

God must be internally and eternally active so that creation can occur without any change in God. According to Llull's theory, the Trinity is the internal, eternal activity in the Godhead. In other words, for creation to come about without implying change in the Godhead, the Dignities would need to have been active internally and eternally, and consequently, this activity can only exist without implying plurality if it is triune.¹ To demonstrate this internal, eternal and necessary action within the Dignities, Llull, in effect, invented new Latin forms to convey in that language as well as in the Romance tongues what can be expressed readily in Hebrew and Arabic: namely, deriving transitive and passive verb forms from a noun in order to express agent and patient (i.e., the object doing good and the subject receiving that good). For example, taking the Dignity of Goodness, *bonea* in Catalan, the correlatives of action would be expressed as *bonificant* (the agent), *bonificat* or *bonificable* (the recipient) and *bonificar* (the act). The "Arabic mode of speech" of these correlatives of action, as they were referred to by Llull's detractors in Paris, was the key for a Christian reading of God and the creation and would force Jews and Muslims to re-examine their beliefs (See Pring-Mill; Hames, "Language of Conversion").

In the Catalan *Libre de Déu* (1300), dedicated to explicating the nature of God, one can almost hear echoes of Llull's many conversations with his Jewish—or Muslim—contemporaries. The book is divided into two main sections, the first dealing with God according to His essence, properties, Dignities and their acts; and the second part with Christ and the Incarnation. Each of the main sections is divided into ten chapters answering ten questions, and each chapter is made up of ten paragraphs. Llull writes in the introduction:

Aquest libre es molt util a saber, e pot esser sabut en breu de temps... E encara ab eyl pot hom contrastar ab infals, destruent a eyls les errors e objeccions que fan contra le fe catholica, als quals pot hom fer per aquest libre objeccions e probacions, les quals eyls per raho no poran destruir. [This book is very useful for acquiring knowledge, and it is possible to study it in a very brief period... and moreover, with it, one can dispute with the non-believers, destroying the errors and objections they have against the Christian faith, against which, using this book, one can formulate

¹ For a more detailed exposition of how Llull utilized the *Ars* for the purpose of convincing the Jews of the truth of Christianity, see Hames, *Art of Conversion*. On the *Ars* itself, see Bonner; and for the development of the theory of correlatives of action in Llull's thought, see Gayà Estelrich.

counter-arguments and proofs, which they will not be able to destroy using reason.] (*Libre de Déu* 273; translation mine)

The arguments are developed so to counter the opponents' objections as they arise, and Llull hopes that, in the end, his opponents will admit the truth of the Christian concept of God.

Llull begins his reasoning with the proof that there must be a God who is at the greatest distance from contrariety and evil and is the most perfect infinite Goodness, Greatness and all the other Dignities (*Libre de Déu* 275-277).² All the Dignities must be equal in essence and nature, otherwise they would be accidents and unable to exist in themselves, by themselves, and would therefore be imperfect. Hence, each Dignity is essentially identified with and includes all the other Dignities. Llull continues with a discussion about the acts of the Dignities:

Sens aquests actes neguna dignitat no pot esser soberina, axi con bonea, qui sens bonificar hauria natura ociosa, la qual ociositat li seria mal, ab lo qual no poria esser sobirana... E car les sobiranes dignitats se convertesxen, cove que les sobirans actes de eyles se convertesquen, en tant que la un sia l altre; per lo qual convertiment cove esser de necessitat un ens sobira, lo qual ensercam e un Deu appeylam, qui es sobira per sobira bonificar, magnificar, durar e los altres. E en aquest pas començam a significar la sancta divina trinitat de la qual parlarem en les altres questions. [Without which acts none of the Dignities can be sovereign, for instance goodness, which without *bonificar* would have an idle nature, which idleness would be evil, and as a result, it [good] could not be sovereign... And in the same manner that the sovereign Dignities are mutually identified, their sovereign acts are also mutually identifiable, inasmuch as one is the other; by which mutual identification, by necessity there must be one sovereign being, for which we are searching and which we will call one God, who is sovereign through the sovereign acts of *bonificar*, *magnificar*, *durar* and all other [acts of the other Dignities]. And in this manner, we begin to indicate the holy divine Trinity, which we will discuss more in the other questions.] (*Libre de Déu* 278-279; translation mine)

In the second chapter, Llull asks "What is God?" His answer is first and foremost that God is a whole unity and substance in which each of the Dignities is the other:

Mas, la unitat de Deu es de si matexa plena, en quant ha natura de unient, unit, e unir de tota sa essencia matexa, e en si matexa, e per si matexa, eternalment e infinida,

² This proof is very Anselmian in character as Llull is looking from "a being, that a greater being than that being there cannot be" (Anselm 116-121).

sens la qual natura de unient, unit e unir no poria esser de di matexa plena, ans seria enaxi buyda e ociosa... Ayço mateix del enteniment, a qui n privaria natura de entenent, entes e entendre. [Moreover, the unity of God is of itself whole, in that it has the nature of *unient* (agent), *unit* (patient) and *unir* (act of unifying) eternally and infinitely in all its essence, in itself, and for itself, without which nature of *unient*, *unit*, and *unir*, it would be unable to be whole of itself, because it would be empty and idle... as would be the intellect if deprived of the nature of *entenent* (agent), *entes* (patient) and *entendre* (the act of understanding).] (*Libre de Déu* 286; translation mine)

In other words, as a matter of logic, the very unity of God necessarily implies this internal triune structure, for otherwise it cannot be a unity. Since the Trinitarian structure is the essential and eternal nature of the divine, it must be such for each of the Dignities as well.

Llull goes on to say that God is the substance which is natural Goodness, Greatness, etc., giving a list of ten divine Dignities in this work, instead of the usual nine found in almost all his other works of this period.³ In the context of this work, which might possibly reflect Llull's polemic with Jews, the apparent reference to the ten *Sefirot* of the Kabbalah is not insignificant, as the following passage shows:

Deus es aquella substancia e essencia qui es de moltes coses, sens que aquelles no son parts d eyla. Ayço no pot hom dir de angel, ne de neguna substancia creada, con sia ço que la substancia de angel sia ajustada de natural bonea, granea, duracio e les altres, qui son parts d eyl, en quant que la una no es l altra. Mas, en Deu, bonea, granea, eternitat e les altres se convertexen... Es encara Deus substancia qui es molt coses sens part, en quant bonea; la qual bonea es de moltes coses sens parts, axi con de bonificatiu, bonificable, e bonificar. E car lo bonificatiu es tota la bonea, no es part d eyla, e car bonifica de tot si mateix lo bonificat, esta la bonificat tota la bonea, e no part. Ayço mateix de lo bonificar qui es tota la bonea, en quant es de tot lo bonificant e l bonificat. Es encara Deus substancia e essencia qui es de moltes coses sens parts, en quant Deus pare es tota la substancia divina, e tot si mateix engenra Deu fill, qui es tota la substancia; e de tota la substancia d amdos ix lo sanct esperit qui es tota la substancia. [God is that substance and essence which consists of many things, without their being parts of Him. One cannot say this of an angel, or of any other created thing, since the substance of an angel is made up of natural goodness, greatness and duration which are parts of him, in that any one of them is not the other. However, in God, goodness, greatness, eternity and the others [the other Dignities] are mutually convertible... Therefore, God is a substance of many things without division: in that He is goodness; that goodness has many things without division, i.e., *bonificatiu*

³ *Libre de Déu*: "Deus es aquella substancia qui es natural bonea, granea, eternitat, poder, saviesa, volentat, virtut, veritat, gloria e compliment" (289).

(agent), *bonificable* (patient) and *bonificar* (act of goodness). And in the same way that *bonificatiu* is the entire goodness, not part of it, and since it bonifies the *bonificat* (patient) from all of itself, so *bonificat* is total goodness and not part of it. The same is true of *bonificar*, which is total goodness in that it is all of *bonificant* and *bonificat*. Thus, God is a substance and essence which is of many things without division, in that God the Father is the totality of the divine substance, and His being/matter generates God the Son, who is the totality of the divine substance; and from the totality of the substance of both emerges the Holy Spirit, who is the totality of the divine substance.] (*Libre de Déu* 290-291; translation mine)

God, in other words, is different from all created beings in that although His essence is composed of many divine Dignities, they are each a totality of His essence, not just part of it, and therefore, God is one unified essence. But in the same way that being unified implies the internal triune relationship of agent-patient-act, each of these three relational elements is a totality of each of the others, the Dignities and the divine essence, and this eternal and internal relationship is the Trinity.

In another passage Llull explains how the unity of God can only be a unity in Trinity. When considered in the context of a disputation with Jews, the latter would then have to think about and explain very carefully, their own conception of the unity of God. Since Llull's Kabbalist contemporaries accept unwaveringly God's eternal wisdom and will, the question then arises as to how can these attributes exist without contradicting the perfect and simple unity of the Godhead. Llull's correlatives seem to provide a comprehensive explanation that will allow for these attributes without contradicting the divine unity:

Deus enten que sa unitat es complida, e no poria entendre que sa unitat fos complida sens natura de unient, unit e unir, sens los quals sa natura no hauria poder natural, ni natural concordança, ni igualitat, virtut, gloria e bontat. Ha, donchs, la divina unitat, qui es compleda natura de unient, unit, e unir, per la qual u es de u, axi con lum de lum, ço es a saber, que l unit es del unient, e l unir es d amdos. E l unir per via de generacio es lo pare e l fill, e es lo pare e l fill, car en aquell engenrar e unir es lo fill del pare, engenrant lo pare lo fill de si mateix e no de altre; e cascuna singular propietat personal e ensemps son una propietat communa [God understands that His unity is perfect, and He could not understand that His unity was perfect without the nature of *unient*, *unit* and *unir*, because without them His nature would not have natural power, or natural concordance, equality, virtue, glory or goodness. The divine unity, therefore, is a complete nature of *unient*, *unit*, and *unir*, in that one is of one, like light of light, in other words, that the patient is of the agent, and the act of unity is of them both. And *unir* through generation is the Father and Son, and it is the Father and Son because in *engenrar* and *unir*, the Son is of the Father, the Father gen-

erating the Son of Himself and not of any other; and each of the persons is a single individual property and together they are one common property] (*Libre de Déu* 294; translation mine)

Thus, the very unity of God is dependent on this Trinity, without which it would be impossible to ascribe to God any attributes without contradicting that unity. Therefore, when Llull asks “Of what quantity is God?,” he can reply:

Deus es substancia sens negun accident. E car quantitat es accident, Deus no pot esser quant per quantitat. E encara, car Deu es substancia infinida e eternal, quantitat en eyla no ha loch, ni segons extensitat ni vertut, ni segons temps. E car en Deu no cau quantitat, Deu pare, sens quantitat, produu e engenra Deu fill eternalment e infinida; e l pare e l fill, sens quantitat, espiren lo sanct espirit per infinir e eternar. [God is a substance with no accidents. And since quantity is an accident, God cannot be a number through quantity. And moreover, because God is infinite and eternal substance, there is no place in Him for quantity, neither with regard to extent, virtue or time. And because God is not consistent with quantity, God the Father, without quantity, produces and generates God the Son eternally and infinitely; and the Father and Son, without quantity, breathe the Holy Spirit through the acts of *infinir* and *eternar*.] (*Libre de Déu* 302; translation mine)

In other words, if for God to be a unity He must be a Trinity of eternal operation, then the persons of the Trinity are not quantity in the divinity because they are the essential structure and unity of God. One could almost imagine a dialogue between Llull and his Jewish opponent as something like the following:

Ramon: “I have now conclusively demonstrated the necessary existence of a Trinity in the divine Dignities which are the whole essence of God, and hence, the truth of the Christian faith.”

Solomon: “Ah, but what you have shown is that God is not a simple perfect being, in that there is a plurality of persons in the Dignities (*Sefirot*). We believe that God is one simple eternal being encompassing His Dignities (*Sefirot*).”

Ramon: “Listen carefully: the Trinity is not a plurality, because it is the very essence of God’s oneness and simplicity. Without this triune relationship, God could not be one in perfect simplicity, nor could creation have taken place without admitting change in the Godhead. This necessary eternal and internal dynamic within the Godhead is what we Christians call the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in three, three in one.”

Solomon: “Hmm, give me a moment to think about that one.”

In Barcelona during the summer of 1263, in the presence of the count-King James I, Friar Paul, a Dominican converted from Judaism, held a public disputation with Nahmanides, the leading Jewish intellectual figure of the realm, in order to prove the truth of the Christian faith. On the Sabbath following the end of the disputation, the king, along with his confessor and prior Minister General of the Dominican order, Ramon de Penyafort, and Friar Paul, came to one of the synagogues in Barcelona to preach to the Jews. Nahmanides, Solomon ibn Adret's teacher, was able to dismiss Ramon de Penyafort's explication of the Trinity as "wisdom, will and power" by saying:

ואמרתי שאני מודה שהאלוה חכם ולא טיפש, וחפץ בלא הרגשה, ויכול ולא חלש. אבל לשון שלוש טעות גמורה, שאין החכמה בבורא מקרה, אבל הוא וחכמתו אחד והוא וחפצו אחד והוא ויכולתו אחד. אם כן החכמה והחפץ והיכולת הכל אחד. וגם אם היו מקרים בו, אין הדבר שהוא אלהות שלשה אבל הוא אחד נושא מקרים שלשה... ואם נמנה כן בטעות, על כרחנו נאמר רבוע, כי הדבר שהוא אלוה וחכמתו וחפצו ויכולתו ימנו, והנה הם ארבעה. ועוד יש לכם לומר חמוש, כי הוא חי, והחיות בו כמו החכמה ויהיו גדרו: חי חכם חפץ יכול ועצם האלהות חמשה. כל זה טעות מבואר.

[I admit that God is wise and not foolish, that He has will without emotion, and that He is powerful and not weak. However, the term Trinity is completely erroneous, for wisdom is not an accident in the Creator. Rather, He and His wisdom are one, He and His will are one, He and His power are one, and if so, wisdom, will and power are one. Even if God had accidental qualities, they would not be a Trinity, but they would be one substance with three accidental properties... If we erroneously count [three in the divine], we would have to speak necessarily about four, for the being who is the deity, with His wisdom, will and power, make four in total. Moreover, we should be speaking of five, in that He is living which is in Him equally like His wisdom, and thus He should be defined as living, wise, willing, powerful and the essence of the deity making five! And clearly, this is erroneous.] (Nahmanides 1: 319-320; translation mine)⁴

This answer might have been good enough for the Dominicans Ramon de Penyafort, Friar Paul or Ramon Martí, the author of the inimitable *Pugio fidei*, but it would not have sufficed for Llull, who, as we have seen, did not characterize certain attributes as being the Trinity, but posited the correlatives of action within the divine attributes themselves as the Trinity, which is imperative for the existence of one divine essence. To respond to Llull and neutralize the doctrine of the correlatives, Solomon ibn Adret would need to be more inventive and original.

⁴ For an appraisal of Nahmanides' refutation of Ramon de Penyafort, see Chazan 82-83. On the disputation itself, see Cohen 108-128 and Hames, "Reason and Faith."

Solomon ibn Adret did in fact consider the position Llull expressed in the imaginary dialogue above. In a response to “One of the Wise Men of the Gentiles,”—without doubt, Ramon Llull himself—he engaged the issue directly using Lullian terminology purposely, but subtly, to show that Llull’s ideas could be refuted.⁵ The discussion is centered on Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One.” The obvious claim raised by the Christian is that the plurality or Trinity of the Godhead is represented here by the appearance of the three names of God, while unity is implied in that they are all One.⁶ Solomon ibn Adret explains:

כי מלת שמע כוללת שלשה עניינים אלה, שמיעת האזן ... והבנת הלב ... וקבלת דבר
והאמנתו ... ותכלית כל זה שתשמע ותבינהו ונחקרהו

[that the word *shema* includes the following three things—the ear hearing... the heart understanding... and its acceptance and belief... and the purpose of all this is that you should hear understand and intellectualize.] (Adret, *Teshubot ha-Rashba* 1: 213; translation mine)⁷

This seems to echo Llull’s Trinitarian structure of the faculties of the soul. Llull’s idea of the soul—based on the Augustinian analogy—is composed of the faculties of the memory remembering, the intellect understanding and the will loving or hating, depending on the specific problem to be addressed. For Llull, refining these faculties is a necessary step along the path to the truth, and through this process one recognizes the Trinity. Solomon ibn Adret, on the other hand, while using similar terminology, implies that after applying these faculties, one will recognize the unity of

⁵ This text is one part of a larger polemical tract, most of which is directed against Ramon Martí. The manuscript evidence shows that this section existed on its own and was edited into the larger polemical tract at a later date. See Hames, *Art of Conversion* 289–292.

⁶ This verse is discussed in *Pugio fidei*; however the text’s discussion does not take into account the Jewish opinion expressed here. See Martin, *Pugio fidei Mauros et Judaeos* 484, 494.

⁷ There is a variant reading in the printed edition, which would translate the last term as ‘remember’ (*tizkerehu*) rather than ‘intellectualize’ (*nahkerehu*), which is closer to Lullian terminology. However, Bodleian Library, Oxford, ms 1587, fol. 88a, which is the earliest and probably the most reliable source, supports the latter reading. In the following citations from this text, I have used the printed edition, incorporating significant changes from the manuscript variants.

the Godhead and the impossibility of any plurality or Trinity within it (Llull, *Ars demonstrativa* 322-24).

Solomon ibn Adret further reinforces the importance of investigating and understanding the unity of the Godhead, in a manner which seems to suggest that he is acutely aware of the seriousness of the challenge to the Jewish conception of the divine. Using the verse “And you shall know today, and you shall place it in your heart, that the Lord is God in the heavens above and upon the earth below; there is no other” (Deut. 4:39), he explains:

לשמוע ולדעת ולבחון אותו מצד החקירה כדי שנדע אמתתו, ושלא נתפתה בהבאתו בחקירה ראשונה, עד שנקבל על הכל מה שאי אפשר לחלוק עליו. ונשיב אותו אל הלב ונחקיר אותו חקירת אמתית הסותרת כל הספורים וכל המחלוקות, כי כל שתוסיף בחקירה תוסיף אמונה ונצוח על כל מי שיטעון בהפך, ואז תביאך החקירה האמתית ליחדו על הכל. כי בשמים ממעל, רמזו לגלגלים ומה שלמעלה מהם, ר"ל השכלים הנפרדים. ועל הארץ מתחת, רמזו לשפלים, אין עוד דומה לו. ואמרו אין עוד לשלול ממנו הרבוי מאיזה צד שיהיה, לא יתכן לומר אין עוד

[Its meaning is to hear and to know Him through intellectualizing, so that we should know His reality, and we should not be tempted to understand [everything] about Him in a preliminary investigation, until we have received about It [the Godhead] everything about which there can be no disagreement. And we should place it in our heart (soul) and intellectualize it [as] a real intellectualization, which will negate all opposites and all divisions [in the Godhead]. Because, the more you intellectualize, the more you will be able to defeat all who claim otherwise. And then, the true intellectualization will bring one [to the knowledge] that “in the heavens above,” implying the spheres and what is below them like the separate intellects, and “upon the earth below,” implying the lower beings, there is nothing comparable to Him, and they said “there is no other” to negate from Him any plurality, for if there was any possibility of plurality, it would be impossible [for the verse] to say “no other”.] (Adret, *Teshubot ha-Rashba* 1: 213-214; translation mine)

This emphasis on the soul’s understanding of the unity of the Godhead would seem to counter the Lullian idea of the soul remembering, understanding and loving the Trinitarian structure. In other words, if in Llull’s *Art* the soul will recognize the existence of the Trinity, Solomon ibn Adret stresses the soul’s need to reflect repeatedly on the Godhead, and to recognize its unity. Moreover, if for Llull, reflection on creation illustrates God’s Trinitarian structure, Solomon ibn Adret emphasizes that wherever the soul searches—in the heavens above or on earth below—God’s perfect unity is demonstrated.

The Christian asks Solomon ibn Adret:

בתפלה, שלשה פעמים הזכרת השם בפסוק שמע, יראה הפך כוננת. כי שם נרמז לשלשה באמרו ה' אלהינו ה' אחד, ונרמז להיות הכל אחד באמרו אחד. ועוד כי אמרו במדרש, אל אלהים ה' דבר ויקרא ארץ, למה נאמרו שלשה שמות הללו כאן לומר שבאותן שלש מדות ברא הקב"ה את עולמו

[In the prayers, the name of God is mentioned three times in the *Shema*, which would seem to imply the opposite of your contention. For the Trinity is signified when it says "the Lord our God the Lord," and complete unity is implied when it says "One." Moreover, in the Midrash (Psalms 50:1) it says: "*El Elohim Yahweh* spoke and called it earth." Why were these three names mentioned here? They imply that with these three attributes (*midot*) God created His world.] (Adret, *Teshubot ha-Rashba* 1: 214; translation mine)⁸

The Midrash on this verse in Psalms is indeed a very strong argument for the Christian position: למה הזכיר שמו של הקב"ה ג' פעמים. ללמדך שבשלשה שמות הללו ברא הקב"ה את עולמו כנגד שלשה מדות שבהן נברא [“Why is the name of God mentioned three times? To teach you that with these three names God created His world, signifying the three good attributes with which God created His world; Wisdom, Knowledge and Intelligence”] (ha-Kohen 94; translation mine). Hence, as far as the Christians were concerned, the Trinity was signified. However, in Adret’s response, the latter part of the Midrash referring to the names of the divine attributes was not cited by the Christian, suggesting that the Midrash was probably not used here as it commonly was in Christian polemic (*Pugio fidei* 494; Abner of Burgos 1: 162; see also Joseph b. R. Nathan Official 57-58). The nature of Solomon ibn Adret’s answer seems to suggest that Llull evokes this Midrash as a textual base to show rationally and by necessary reason how his theory of the Dignities’ eternal and active correlatives imply the necessity of a Trinity, without which structure the act of creation would have been impossible. Llull would not have wanted to utilize the latter part of the Midrash giving the names of the attributes, because both he and Solomon ibn Adret are in agreement that there are divine attributes (whether referred to as Dignities or *Sefirot*), and Llull was interested in demonstrating their internal eternal structure. Solomon ibn Adret in his reply does not refer to the latter part of the Midrash either, strengthening the supposition that his

⁸ This Midrash is also quoted in *Pugio fidei* (Martin 94); however, there is no correlation between Martí’s discussion and the answer given by Adret, which would suggest that Martí was unaware of the more mystical interpretation adopted by Adret in his answer. Martí takes the *proprietas* of *sapientia scientia atque intelligentia* at face value as representing the Trinity.

discussion with Llull was not based on the three attributes wisdom, knowledge and intelligence cited in the Midrash.

Solomon ibn Adret does not try to contradict Llull with a different exegetical explanation of the *Shema* and the Midrash. Instead, obviously perceiving a real threat from Llull regarding the problem of the essence and unity of the Godhead, he suggests a Kabbalistic explanation with regard to the different names of God in the Bible. He explains that the name *Elohim* refers to a leader and judge, and hence, that the three names in the *Shema* are meant to emphasize that it is God himself—not a star, angel or constellation—who watches over and judges the Jews and that He is one, unlike the other nations who are guided and led by one of God's creations. Following this, however, Solomon ibn Adret says:

ומה שאמרו במדרש, אל אלוהים ה' דבר וגו', שבאותן שלש מדות ברא הקב"ה את עולמו במדת אל ואלהים ה'. דע, כי שלש מדות יש, מדן הדין ומדת רחמים ומדת מזוגית בין הדין ובין הרחמים. ודע, כי אי אפשר להיות העולם עומד על שלמותו בשתי המדות הראשונות לבד. שאם נברא במדת הדין לבד, אי אפשר לו להתקיים רגע, כי אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא. ואם חטא, היתה מדת הדין פוגעת בו מיד, וכלתו ואת עציו ואת אבניו, והיה העולם שמם... וכן אם נברא במדת הרחמים היה הכל שוה ברוב החטא, ויעבוד או יכפור אין הפרש. ואם כן, כי מדת הרחמים תכפר על הכל ותתבטל הכונה בבריאה, שנבראו הנבראים לעבודת השי"ת ולבחור בטוב ומאוס ברע. על כן אי אפשר להיות לו עמידה על הכונה האמיתית שנברא עליה עד שנברא במדה כלולה משתי מדות האלה להאריך אפו לחוטא אולי ישוב ורפא לו. ועודנו לא ישוב, העונש בזה ובבא, זה אמת ונכון. ושם אלהים, מדת הדין הגמורה. ושם ה', מדת הרחמים הגמורה ושם אל, מדה כלולה ומזוגה.

[And of what the Rabbis said in the Midrash, that with those three attributes (*midot*) God created the world, with the attributes *El*, *Elohim* and *Yahweh*, know that there are three attributes; judgment, mercy and a third being a total conjunction (*mezugab*) of both judgment and mercy.⁹ And know that it is impossible for the world to stand perfected, and for the purpose for which it was created, with only the first two attributes alone. For if the world had been created with the attribute of Judgment alone, it could not have existed for a moment, since there is no righteous man in the world who can always do good and never sin. And if he sinned, the attribute of Judgment would have acted instantly and destroyed it [the world], its trees, its stones and the world would be deserted... And if the world was created with the attribute of total Mercy alone, everything would be equal, goodness and sinfulness, and there would be no difference between one who worshipped and one who transgressed, and there would be no judgment because the attribute of Mercy would forgive every transgression, and that would negate the reason for creation, because creatures were created in order to worship God, choosing good and hating evil. Hence, it is impossible for

⁹ The word *know* is a common linguistic term used to introduce a Kabbalistic teaching. This terminology is not used in the other chapters of this treatise.

anyone to have any conception of the true intention in the creation [of the world] until [he understands that] it was created from an attribute incorporating the two other attributes, to extend His mercy to the sinner, perhaps he will repent and will be healed. And if he still does not repent, the punishment will be in this and the next [world], and this is the Truth and it is correct. And the name *Elohim* represents the attribute of complete Judgment. And the name *Yahweh*, the attribute of complete Mercy. And the name *El* is the attribute of total conjunction (*mezugah*) of both.] (*Teshubot ha-Rashba* 1: 218; translation mine)¹⁰

In this answer Solomon ibn Adret does not hesitate to reveal supposedly esoteric Kabbalistic teachings that form a basis for explaining the emanations of God, the world of the *Sefirot* and creation. This answer reveals a Kabbalistic view of the relationship between the three divine names and the attributes (See Idel, “Notes on the Fringe” 691). Solomon ibn Adret’s choice of terminology is not accidental, but rather part of the overall context of his answer and the way he deals with the Midrashic text. Through the use of the root *mzg* (‘conjunction’) to describe the relationship between the two opposing attributes and the third, Solomon ibn Adret adopts and adapts Lullian terminology to refute Lull’s own suggestion that the three names of God accord with his intrinsic Trinitarian structure of the Dignities. Lull maintains that the idea of *conjunció* or *composta* helps explain the relationship between the different persons of the Trinity and their eternal activity in the Dignities. Solomon ibn Adret, understanding the dangers inherent in Lull’s teachings, explained that the three names do not represent the internal operations of the Dignities which allow creation to take place, but rather refer to three of the ten *Sefirot*, without which creation would have been impossible and the world could not have come into existence. This argument does not seem to refute Lull directly, since it does not undermine his doctrine of the correlatives of action, but it does return a doubting Kabbalist to a framework through which the unity of God can be envisioned without a Trinitarian structure.

¹⁰ See also *Perushei ha-Aggadot* (50) where Adret starts his teaching with: “And there is in this a secret”; i.e., he is revealing Kabbalah. However, here the terminology is different. Adret does not discuss the third attribute as a conjunction of the other two, but as “including” the other two. This would indicate the importance of the terminology in the answer to the Christian scholar, further supporting the supposition that it is Lull, as Adret is using the former’s terminology. See also Lull: “The keys to the gates of love are guided with cares, sighs and tears . . . And the gates are guarded by justice and mercy” (*Book of the Lover* 194, versicle 42).

This line of argument is clarified in the continuation of the passage where Solomon ibn Adret seems to take issue with Llull's Trinitarian structure. He writes:

ומה שיגלה לך עוד זה, הוא מה שכתב בראש התורה, ביום עשות ה' אלהים ארץ ארץ ושמים או ביום עשות אלהים ארץ ושמים היתה באפשר לומר שהזכיר השם האחד ומן הידוע שהוא כולל את הכל כאמרך אדם שגדרת בו כל מה שהיה בגדר האדם... אבל אם באת להזכירו בפרטי הדברים שגודרים אותו אינך נמלט מהזכיר כל פרטיו שגודרים אותו. על כן, בבואו לדבר בפרטי המדות שברא העולם על הכונה שאמרת לא היה באפשר למנות השתים ולהניח הא'. אבל לפי מה שאמרתי אני ראוי ונאות כן. שאי אפשר לשתי המדות, ר"ל מדת הדין ומדת הרחמים להתקבץ ביחד שלא תתילד מביניהם המדה המזוגה הכלולה משתייהן בהכרח. ופעמים ידבר הכתוב באחת, ויודע שהכל ביחד כאמרו בראשית ברא אלהים, ופעמים ימנה השתי מדות להיות ההכרח נותן שנתמזג השלישית מהשתים באמרו ביום עשות ה' אלהים ארץ ושמים.

[And what will be further revealed to you is what is written at the beginning of the Torah, "On the day *Yahweh, Elohim* made heaven and earth" (Genesis 2:4), it would have been possible to write the one name [of God] and as it is well known, it includes everything, as for example when you say [the word] *man* by saying which you have included all that is in the definition of man... but if you intend to mention all the parts of which man is composed, you have no choice but to mention all the different parts of which he is composed. Hence when speaking about the particulars of the attributes with which the world was created, according to your theory, it would be impossible to mention just two and leave out the third. But, according to what I have explained, it is right and proper to do so. Is it possible to have the two attributes, i.e., the attribute of Justice and that of Mercy, come together and from necessity bring forth this third conjunction containing the other two? So sometimes, He [God] will mention each one by name, as in "*El, Yahweh, Elohim* spoke and called earth" as I have explained, and sometimes He [God] will enumerate two attributes, which implies by necessity the conjunction of the third from the other two, as is written, "On the day *Yahweh, Elohim* made heaven and earth."]¹¹

Solomon ibn Adret states that if the three names *El, Elohim* and *Yahweh* represent the internal Trinitarian operation of the Dignities that allows creation to take place, as Llull claims, then every time the Bible mentions God as creator and one of these names appears, all three of the names should be referenced. If the three names do not appear, then Llull's theory of the correlatives is not operable, because one (or two) of the elements of this eternal activity within the Dignities, allowing creation to occur, is missing. For Llull, all three of the persons are essential, whereas, says

¹¹ Translation mine from *Teshubot ha-Rashba* of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, ms 1587, fols. 93b-94a. I have cited this passage directly from the earliest manuscript.

Solomon ibn Adret, according to our understanding, these divine names refer to three different *Sefirot* which are important for the act of creation, and whether or not the third name is specifically mentioned, it is nonetheless inferred that it necessarily comes forth from the other two. Hence, the three names do not imply an internal and eternal Trinitarian structure within the *Sefirot*, but rather refer to three of the ten *Sefirot* that balance the act of creation. Thus, there is no Trinity, but rather a unity in the Godhead.¹²

Solomon ibn Adret's use of this theosophical explanation must suggest that he felt that the issue being addressed was important and merited a strong defense, and Llull's views with regard to the necessity of a Trinity in the Godhead demanded serious rebuttal.¹³ For the Kabbalists, as well as

¹² Compare this with how Adret treats the same issue of the divine names in his *Commentary on the Legends of the Talmud*, a work meant for internal consumption:

יש בזה סוד, וכבר ידעת שבא להם ז"ל בכל מקום שנאמר אלהים מידת הדין, ויו"ד ו"ו ה"י מידת הרחמים, והם כוללים מן העולם ועד העולם, שאי אפשר לעולם להתקיים רק בשתי מידות האלו אבל לא בדין לבד ולא ברחמים לבד, ועל כן לא נזכרו שני שמות הללו בתורה בבריאת העולם עד שנבראו שמים וארץ וכל צבאם כאמרו ביום עשות ה' אלהים ארץ ושמים ואמרו ז"ל שהזכיר שם מלא על עולם מלא. ומי שחננו ה' יתברך דעה ידע וישיכל אמיתת מה שהוא בכח השכל האנושי להשיג באמיתתו יתברך ובמידותיו.

[“And in this matter there is a secret [i.e., a Kabbalistic teaching]. And you already know what our Rabbis received, that in every place where it says *Elohim*, it refers to the attribute of Judgment, and *Yud Vav Heh*, to the attribute of Mercy, and they contain everything. For it is impossible for this world to exist without these two attributes, however, not with Judgment alone or Mercy alone. And, therefore, these two names were not mentioned in the Torah in relation to the creation of the world, till the heavens and earth and all they contain were created, as it says: ‘On the day Yahweh, our God made heaven and earth,’ and our Rabbis explained that He said the whole name when the world was whole. And to those whom the Lord has granted knowledge, they will know and intellectualize the truth of what is in the potential of the human intellect to achieve knowledge about His essence and attributes.”] (Adret, *Perushei ha-Aggadot* 50; translation mine)

¹³ This vehement defense of the unity of the Godhead by Adret has been noted by Idel, who adds that it is the disciples of Adret who categorically reject interdeical dynamism (*Kabbalah* 138-139). The importance of Adret's answer to Llull, as well as the challenge inherent in the Lullian approach, was felt strongly not only among Adret's disciples in Barcelona but also among those with whom Adret was in contact both in Catalonia and further afield. Reading Adret's answer as a rebuttal of Llull helps explain the vehemence expressed in the writings of the circle around Adret in their defense of the unity of the Godhead and the denial of any possible plurality or corporeality. This circle, far more than the previous generations, engaged in detailed attempts to show how the Godhead, even with a multiplicity of *Sefirot*, was, in fact, one. See Hames, *Art of Conversion* 271-283.

for Llull, the adoption of Platonic and Neoplatonic terminology was of prime importance for explaining the act of creation as well as man's relationship to God and the world. Whereas for Llull the inherent metaphysical logic of this system was a Trinitarian one, Solomon ibn Adret and his disciples had to uphold the deeply-held belief in the unity of the Godhead. Hence, while Solomon ibn Adret's response does not seem categorically to undermine Llull's argument, it does present a doubting Jew with a terminology and language concerning the Godhead with which he was familiar.

It was, however, the third protagonist, Abner of Burgos, or Alfonso de Valladolid, who was best able to utilize the analysis of his predecessors and produce a potent argument that seemed to prove the necessity of a Trinitarian God. Born c. 1265 in Burgos, and probably a physician by profession, Abner was deeply influenced by the miraculous appearance of crosses on the clothes of the Jewish participants in a failed messianic movement in Castile in 1295. This vision initiated a series of events, including some dreams, which eventually led to his conversion to Christianity and adoption of the name Alfonso around 1320 (See Baer, *History of the Jews* 1: 327-354; Hecht 26-49; Szpiech 307-329). In some ways, Abner can be considered the first serious missionary to the Jews; not because he is the first person to engage with his own former beliefs and authoritative texts, but because as an apostate, he purposely wrote in a language, Hebrew, that would be understood by his learned Jewish contemporaries and expressly stated that he was writing to convince Jews to convert (Szpiech 167-172, 316).¹⁴ He was dangerous because he utilized Christian and other philosophical sources already translated into Hebrew and therefore known to his readers, but these sources were secondary to

This was clearly a concern in the Zohar as well, where there is use of Trinitarian language. See Liebes 140-146.

¹⁴ See also the following passage from the start of *Mostrador de justicia*: "E por amor que las rrazones ssean más paladinas e manifestas a quien quisiere saber la verdat en ellas, quisse conponer este libro, que lo llamé por nonbre 'Mostrador de Justicia', por mostrar la ffe çierta, e la verdat e la justicia en ella, a los judios, que la avien mester, segund que me ffue dicho, e para rresponder a todas las contradiciones e las dubdas, o las más dellas, que non pueden ffazer todo judio rrebelde e contrdezidor a las nuestras palabras" ["And in order that reason should be more clarified and manifest for those who desire to know the truth of it, I wished to write this book entitled 'Teacher of Righteousness,' to demonstrate the true faith and its truth and justice to the Jews who have need of it as I was told, and to respond to all the contradictions and doubts, or most of them that can be made by any rebellious or contradictory Jew to our words"] (Abner of Burgos 15; translation mine).

his nuanced reading of the Jewish texts which illuminated Christian truths as he understood them: these truths being, in his opinion, the logical extension and conclusion of his Jewish praxis and tradition. In other words, unlike many previous polemicists, being intimately familiar with the sources and using a language and terminology that his contemporaries understood, Abner arrived at conclusions that could not easily be dismissed out of hand by his Jewish interlocutors.

All of Abner's writing should first and foremost be read as his own attempt to justify his conviction that Christianity is the true faith. Abner's criticism of Judaism stems from his own awareness of the different schools of Jewish thought and of the complex and ongoing discussions concerning the nature of the Divine. His eventual adoption of Christian beliefs is a reflection of the conclusions he reached after having searched and engaged with the various philosophical and theological schools in his Jewish milieu. That said, it is important to realize that Jewish theological debates in this period were informed and fueled by their Christian surroundings, and the intellectual borderlines between the faiths in this regard were almost non-existent. The arguments might be framed from within one's own tradition, but the essence of the issues being explored was the same. Hence, Abner's adoption of a Christian response to his existential questions, while unacceptable to his Jewish contemporaries, was not necessarily surprising, since it was an extension of his willingness to follow the truth wherever it seemed to lead him.

Abner's main concern seems to have been with representatives of extreme Aristotelianism within contemporary Judaism who read the Torah to justify their philosophical beliefs, not to follow the commandments to the best of their abilities. This led them to heretical beliefs, such as rejecting the notion of Divine Providence (*hashgaha peratit*) or reward and punishment. It is important to recall that the debate over these issues was on-going in the Jewish communities of Mediterranean Europe for more than a hundred years and had become more sophisticated as translations from Arabic and Latin sources became available and philosophical treatises, commentaries on Maimonides and biblical commentaries were written.¹⁵ Clearly, Abner had also been exploring these issues, and his comments indicate that his conversion and acceptance of Christian

¹⁵ For an overview of the Maimonidean controversy, see Sarachek; Baer, *History of the Jews* 1: 96-110; Neuman 2: 117-145; Silver; Halbertal; and Hames, *Art of Conversion* 31-82.

dogma was a reaction to the philosophical problems and existential dilemmas that he faced and provided him a solution to those conflicts.

In his writings, Abner suggests that Christians fulfill the commandments of the Torah far better than Jews: e.g., Isaac Polgar, his former disciple and friend, and the author of a number of treatises that contradicted Abner's ideas (see Belasco iv-vii; Sirat 315-322; Hecht 50-59). According to Abner, the four core beliefs mentioned by Polgar—that there is a first principle, unique, incorporeal and not a faculty in a body—accompanied the Christian doctrine of Divine providence and recompense, which were fundamental to the commandments and their purpose (Hecht 349, 135). In addition, the four aforementioned beliefs are made complete through the Trinity and Incarnation, which bring about human perfection (Hecht 349-354, 135-144).¹⁶ The Trinity and the Incarnation were, perhaps unsurprisingly, the two issues that most concerned Abner, and his writings show a constant grappling with these two pivotal dogmas of the Christian faith.¹⁷ Abner's later works present his dialogue with Jewish contemporaries, such as Polgar, and in those writings, his discussion of the Trinity is innovative and challenging. Perhaps one of the most interesting discussions of the Trinity appears in the Hebrew *Teshuvot le-Meharef*, a response to Isaac Polgar composed around 1340. Here, Abner utilizes Llull's arguments and translates them into a Jewish context and language in a way that supersedes and dismisses Solomon ibn Adret's earlier response.

¹⁶ Hecht includes a Hebrew edition and English translation of Abner's *Teshuvot le-Meharef* (*Response to the Blasphemer*), which is his response to Polgar's attack in his *Iggeret Teshuvat Apikoros*. The following citations are from the Hebrew edition. I also give the relevant pages in the English translation, with some emendations.

¹⁷ A recent analysis of *Mostrador de justicia* has shown that it was the first work written after Abner's public conversion (c. 1322—though he clearly decided to convert after his dream c. 1317) and represents an internal dialogue, not unlike that of his famous medieval predecessor, Petrus Alfonsi, between the Teacher of Righteousness and his previous Jewish self. The central chapter of this long and detailed work is one dealing with the Incarnation. According to Abner, not accepting the Incarnation negates the whole meaning of the Torah, because without the Incarnation, there can be no reward and punishment. The Torah does not reveal this clearly, since, as Abner believed, things are supposed to be revealed over time and the true meaning of the Torah only became apparent after the coming of the Messiah, i.e., Jesus. See Szpiech for a discussion of the polemic on the Trinity (150-240). See Abner of Burgos, in Vol. 1, Chapter 6 on the Incarnation and Chapters 4-5 on the Trinity.

Abner takes the same Midrash on Psalm 50:1 that was the basis for Llull's and Adret's discussion and explains it. His approach is not that of a Christian trying to use it as an *exemplum* to demonstrate the existence of the Trinity, but that of a philosopher who exposes its inherent meaning to reveal Christian truth. In other words, Abner is not Llull, who evokes the Midrash as a textual documentation for his doctrine of the correlatives. Since Llull was unfamiliar with the linguistic formulations and their range of meaning, he was unable to explain it perfectly to his audience, and thus allowed Adret to explain it otherwise. Abner embraces the Midrash, as understood by his Jewish contemporaries, to show through its interpretation the Christian truth. Adret's response to Llull is technical; he uses Jewish terminology unfamiliar to Llull to assuage the doubts of his Jewish audience. Abner does not give his Jewish interlocutors that luxury, in that he uses his familiarity with the language and terminology to demonstrate the inherent necessity of a Trinity in the Divine Unity.

Abner cites the aforementioned Midrash and then writes:

ויש להתבונן בזה המאמר כי לא יתכן להיות העולם נברא אלא אם כן היו בבורא אותן שלוש המדות הללו אשר יורו עליהן שלשה שמותיו אל אלהים יהוה מצד שהם שלשה לעצם האלוה האחד. ויורו עליהן אותם שלשה שמות אחרים מצד העניינים עצמם ... אבל הוא הוא החכמה שלו, והוא הוא התבונה שלו, והוא הדעת שלו.

[One must conclude from this passage that the world could not have been created unless the Creator had these three attributes which are indicated by His three names "*El, Elohim, YHWH*" because they are three (parts) of the one divine substance. They are indicated by those three other names: wisdom, understanding and knowledge, because of their essential characteristics ... He Himself is His wisdom, and He Himself is His understanding, and He Himself is His knowledge.] (Hecht 355, 146-147)¹⁸

Abner then explains the relevance of these three terms to the three names of God, stating that Wisdom, because of its universality and absoluteness, corresponds to the Father; Understanding, which is born from Wisdom, corresponds to the Son, also calling attention to the grammatical similarity between the Hebrew for 'son' (*ben*) and 'understanding' (*binah*); and Knowledge, representing the result of the relationship between Wisdom and Understanding, corresponds to the Holy Spirit. He then states: *הרי לך מדבריהם שיש בעצמותו של קב"ה שלש מדות אשר טעמם כמו שמיחסין אותו הנוצרים אב ובן ורוח הקדש מבלי הכחשה וכחד ביחודו ב"ה*. ["Thus, you

¹⁸ On Abner's use of Kabbalistic ideas in his polemical writings, see Baer, "The Use of Kabbalah" 278-289; and Gershenzon 96-100.

have from their own words that in the substance of the Holy One, blessed be He, there are three attributes whose significance is similar to what the Christians relate to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit without denial or destruction of His unity”] (Hecht 355-357, 147-151; see also Diamond).

Abner relates the attributes and persons of the Trinity to the Divine names in the verse in the following manner: Wisdom and Father to *YHWH*; Understanding and Son to *El*; and Knowledge and Holy Spirit to *Elohim*. He explains that *Elohim* is in the plural form because: כי מורה על עצמו ועל השנים הנשארים כמו שהערך מורה על עצמו ועל שני הנערכים יחדיו. ובעבור זה היה שם אלהים לבדו מורה על שלשת התארים יחדיו. [“it teaches about itself and the other two, just as the relationship teaches about itself and the two related things altogether. For this reason, the name *Elohim* by itself teaches about the three attributes together”] (Hecht 357-359, 152-153). Abner then cites a famous source from *Genesis Rabbah*, in which Rabbi Simlai explains the plurality of the name *Elohim* to a heretic, but his students are not satisfied with the answer. Rabbi Levi explains saying: "קול יי בכחו" אין העולם יכול לעמוד אלא "קול" אלהים. [“If ‘the voice of the Lord [*YHWH*] in His power’ [Deut 4:33] had been written, the world could not have stood. Rather, ‘the voice of *Elohim*’ is written”] (Hecht 359, 154). Abner then explains why this response would have satisfied Rabbi Simlai’s students:

אלא שר' לוי עשה משל מן הקולות לכל הפעולות המשתנות הבאות מאת ה"ה. כי בעבור שאין בעצמו שום ריבוי אמ' הכתוב בלשון יחיד "מדבר מתוך האש" לא "מדברים" בלשון רבים. וכן "ברא אלהים" "ויברא אלהים" ולא "בראו אלהים" ולא "ויבראו אלהים" וכן זולת אלה. אבל בעבור שכחו של ה"ה הוא בלא תכלית בפעל, והעולם מצד שהוא נברא אינו בלא תכלית בפעל, התחייב להיות כחו של ה"ה אשר הוא בלא תכלית בפועל פעל פעולות אין תכלית למספרן זו אחר זו, והם פרטי המציאות כדי שיהיה העולם אחד מצד הכל ובעל תכלית הוא הראוי לבוא מן האחד והוא רבים מצד החלקים הרבים הראויים להיות מאשר הוא כח בלא תכלית.

ולזה אמ' ר' לוי "שלא היה העולם יכול לעמוד בכחו של ה"ה". וזה מצד שהוא כח בלי תכלית, ושאר הנבראים בפועל יכולין להיות בלא תכלית, אלא אם כן היה בו שום רבוי משום צד מחייב פעולות רבות ומשתנות כדי שיהיה שם חזק וחלש ושאר השינויים...

ובכן נתיישבה דעתם של התלמידים באותו פירוש של ר' לוי. כי מן ריבוי התארים העצמיים של ה"ה אשר שם אלהים מורה על שלשתם: והם הכוונה הכללית המשולחת, והכוונה הפרטית המשולחת והערך שביניה, התחייב הריבוי בנבראים מצד האיפשרות שבהן. ושעל כן היה צורך לזכור הכתוב שם אלהים המורה על הרבוי אצל זכרון היחוד...

ולא יתכן לומר כמו שאמרו קצת מפרשים כי אותן שלוש מדות הן מדת הדין, ומדת הרחמים ומדה מזוגה משתיהן. כי לפי דבריהם לא היה ראוי להיות החכמה מיוחסת למדת רחמים ביחוד ולא למדת הדין ולא לאותה מדה מזוגה ביחוד, וכן התבונה וכן הדעת. אין אחת מהן

ראויה להתייחס בייחוד אל אחת מאותן השלש המדות שהזכירו יותר מן האחרת. ועוד שהמדה המזוגה היא יותר ראויה ליחס אליה השם המורה על הרבוי מליחס אותו למדת הדין או למדת הרחמים אשר מהן היה המזוג.

[Rather, Rabbi Levi extended the analogy of the “voices” to all the changing actions emerging from the Holy One, blessed be He. So because there is no multiplicity in His essence, the verse uses the singular form “speaking out of a fire” [Deut 4:33], and not “speaking” [*medabrim*] in the plural form. Thus, “God [*Elohim*] created” [Gen 1:1] “and God [*Elohim*] created” [Gen 1:27] are written, and not “and they the Gods created” or “and they the Gods created” and others besides these. Rather, because the power of the Holy One, blessed be He, is actually infinite and the world—because it is created—is not actually infinite, it must be that the power of the Holy One, which is actually infinite, performs an infinite number of actions one after the other. These are the details of existence in order that the world is one, *qua* totality and purpose, appropriately coming from the One; and the world is filled with multiplicity by virtue of the many parts which deserve to exist because He is a power without end. This is the reason Rabbi Levi said, “the world would not be able to withstand the power of the Holy One blessed be He.” That is because God is an infinite power, and beings created in actuality (with finite powers) cannot be infinite unless they have a multiplicity of some sort which would necessitate continual diverse actions, so that strength and weakness and other changes would (simultaneously and actually) exist in them...

And thus, the students were satisfied with the explanation given by Rabbi Levi: For from the multiplicity of the three essential attributes of the Holy One blessed be He which are indicated by the name *Elohim*: and they are, the absolute universal intention [agent], the absolute particular intention [patient], and the mediating relationship [act], the multiplicity in creation is necessitated. Therefore, there was a need for Scripture to use the name *Elohim* which indicates multiplicity in the mentioning of unity...

It is not possible to say, like some of the commentators have said, that these three attributes are the “attribute of justice,” the “attribute of mercy” and the “attribute which is a conjunction of the two of them.” According to their teachings, it would not be fitting for “wisdom” to be united with the “attribute of mercy,” nor to the “attribute of judgment” nor to the attribute which is a conjunction. Likewise “understanding” and likewise “knowledge” neither of them are fitting to be united with one of those three qualities which were mentioned more than any other.

Furthermore, it is more fitting to connect the attribute of conjunction to the name which teaches about the multiplicity, than to connect it to the “attribute of judgment” or the “attribute of mercy” from which there is the conjunction.] (Hecht 359-364, 153-159)

Abner refutes Adret’s reasoning by using the plurality of the Divine name in Hebrew to demonstrate the absolute necessity of that Trinity without which there can be no unity. The three attributes are not separate *Sefirot*,

nor can the name *El* (in the singular) represent the attribute of conjunction between judgment and mercy as Solomon ibn Adret claimed. The plurality of the divine name *Elohim* unites the three elements—agent, patient and act—which are the inherent and necessary Trinity, without which creation could not have taken place. In other words, it is the combination of the eternal internal activity between the three attributes wisdom, understanding and knowledge, connected to the three divine names of which the third, in its plurality, is the conjunction of the other two, which demonstrates the necessary existence of the Trinity. Abner makes much better use of Lull's correlatives than Lull himself could ever have done: using language and terminology familiar to his audience to create a very powerful argument for the necessary existence of a Trinity that manifests true unity without change in the Godhead.

In the first chapter of the *Mostrador de justicia*, Abner lists twelve reasons why a member of one faith, in this case a Jew, would find it difficult to convert to another faith, i.e., Christianity. This list can perhaps be seen as a reflection of Abner's own tortuous path to conversion. The eleventh reason suggests that conversion might only occur when one has doubts about his/her own faith and is able to find conclusive answers to his doubts in the teachings of the other faith. The problem is that because the doctrines of Christianity are profound, it is difficult to understand them without a good teacher who is himself knowledgeable about those doctrines (Abner of Burgos 47-48). This reflects the similar reasoning found in the arguments of both Adret and Lull regarding conversion from one faith to another.

ומי שיפרידו ויבדילו מאמונתו לאמונה אחרת, מחודשת לא לומר בה, על כל פנים צריך לטענות חזקות ולחקירה רבה עד שינצח הוא עצמו מה שהורגל בו בחקירות ילמדו. וילמדו וישבם אל לבבו הרבה, ויבחנם בחינה אמתית שהם אמת אין דרך לנטות מהם בשום צד. שאלולי זה היה מחסרון הדעת להמיר גוי אלהיו בטענות חלושות, ולא אפילו בחזקות, עד שיבחנם שאין מקום לפול בו הספק משום צד.

[and someone seeking to separate and convert someone from his faith to another faith with which he [the one converting] is unfamiliar, will need, in any case, to present many strong arguments and much investigation till he can overcome [beliefs] to which he is accustomed through his own investigation. He should be taught these [arguments] and he should study and interiorize them in his heart [the soul] many times over and test them faithfully as to whether they are the truth, and that they are not refutable. For without this, it would be lacking in integrity for a person to exchange his God through weak arguments, and not even strong arguments should

[bring] him [to convert] until he has investigated them, and finds that there is no more room for doubt.] (Adret, *Teshubot ha-Rashba* 1: 215)¹⁹

Llull states repeatedly and emphatically that true conversion cannot occur by force or without a logical and rational understanding of the arguments.²⁰ Abner was certain that his reasoning concerning the Trinity provided the requisite proof needed for conversion, for he not only demonstrated the necessity of the Trinity, but did so through Jewish texts. Abner used the authoritative texts of his former faith as documentation for the truth of Christianity. Unlike most earlier Christian polemicists, who employed those texts to strengthen their own beliefs and religious identity more than for conversion purposes, Abner saw his former faith as revealing the inherent truth of Christianity. Abner stressed the common ground of the two faiths while minimizing their differences. While this could be interpreted as merely a strategy adopted to encourage the conversion of his former co-religionists, it can be argued that his methodology also reflects the complexities of religious conversion and his attempt to remove the distinctions that separate a Jew from a Christian, an Alfonso from an Abner.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that in his *Perushei ha-Aggadot*, Adret seems to infer the opposite saying: וכל שהקבלה או הנבואה הנחתו לא תנצחנו החקירה, כי החקירה למטה מן הנבואה ["Anything received or accepted via prophecy will not be contradicted by reason, because reason is inferior to prophecy"] (103; translation mine). He also says that: אבל שיהיה דבר מוכרח מקובל בדינו למה נבטל הקבלה, ואף על פי שהתחייב החקירה הפילוסופית ביטולה ["received lore even if philosophical reasoning shows it to be wrong, should not be abandoned"] (105; translation mine).

²⁰ *Liber de convenientia fidei et intellectus in obiecto* 2. On this point, see the remarkable first part of *Disputatio fidei et intellectus* in which Intellect persuades Faith of the importance of being able to prove via necessary reason the truth of the Christian faith (1-7). Intellect tells a story about the missionary (probably Ramon Martí) who manages to convince a Muslim ruler of the errors in Islam, but who is unable to prove the Christian truths and thus earns the scorn of the ruler who feels that he has lost everything and gained nothing. Llull ridicules this approach and strongly emphasizes the need to be able to prove convincingly the Christian faith. See *De acquisitione Terrae Sanctae* (126-127).

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